**Ideas and Society**

**Is Melbourne Still the Intellectual Capital of Australia?**

NGV Australia, 6 March 2014

**Professor John Dewar:**

So is the Pope still Catholic? Do you still love me, darling? Does my bum still look big in this? Is Sydney still full of itself? The answers of course, are yes, yes, no, and yes.

To those of us born in Melbourne, or who have adopted it as our home, the intellectual superiority of Melbourne seems self-evident. But of course, our task this evening is to prove it. Complacency, not Sydney, is the enemy.

If Melbourne has indeed been the intellectual leader until now, I like to think that La Trobe University has played its part in that. For the past four decades, Emeritus Professor Robert Manne, in my humble opinion the most respected public intellectual in Australia, and his colleagues at the La Trobe Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, have been leading the national debate on some of the really big issues. They have become over the years, household names, like Dennis Altman, John Hirst, Judith Brett, John Carroll, Marilyn Lake and many others. And their topics of discussion are the ones that have had Melbourne, and Australia, talking for decades – reconciliation, racism, sexism, refugees, climate change, media ownership, terrorism, the meaning of Gallipoli, and the decline of social equality. Their intellectual leadership has been just one of the many ways in which La Trobe University has repaid the people of Melbourne and of Victoria, for their generous support of the work we do.

Since the time of the Athenian Academy, all great universities have sought to put life back into their city in this way, and La Trobe is no exception. And Professor Manne’s colleagues have been the force behind the creation of two of Australia's leading publications, *The Monthly* and the *Quarterly Essay*, and where would we be without them now? It’s hard to think of Melbourne or Australia's intellectual landscape without them.

I say two of Australia's leading intellectual publications because there are many more, and publishers of other important publications are amongst our speakers this evening. Hilary McPhee, and author in her own right and founding director of McPhee Gribble, which first published the likes of Tim Winton, Helen Garner, and Murray Bail; Chris Feik, the author of the *Quarterly Essay* and publisher of *Black Inc*, whose authors include some of the most prominent intellectuals and provocateurs in the country; Elizabeth Finkel, a La Trobe Vice Chancellor’s Fellow, politic scientific author, and publisher of Australia's premier science magazine, *Cosmos*; and Jeff Sparrow, award-winning historian of Radical Melbourne, and editor of one of the original intellectual products of Melbourne, *Overland* Magazine.

Can you please welcome them all to tonight’s discussion.

Before I hand over to Rob, let me just make one serious observation about this evening’s topic, because it is a subject of supreme importance to our city and to our state. It’s about our quality of life in all its dimensions, our personal intellectual fulfilment, our artistic creativity, our scientific advancement, and our economic future. In an era when our manufacturing plants are closing down, and our agricultural industries are under threat from climate change, drought and flood, the life of the mind and the fruits of its labours will increasingly become the lifeblood of our city. And a culture that jealously guards its intellectual reputation is a culture eminently suited to the times.

So that makes tonight’s discussion about Melbourne’s intellectual reputation one of immense importance to all of us. And in the spirit of participation, I'd encourage all of you here tonight to join in the conversation on Twitter, using the hash tag ideas and society and Suzie at the front here is going to be tweeting, and be sure to follow La Trobe on Twitter via @latrobe news, but not at the expense of paying attention to what our speakers are going to say of course.

Ladies and gentlemen, Professor Robert Manne.

**Professor Robert Manne:**

Thanks very much John. And thank you Robyn. I'm going to say a very few words about this topic and then I'm going to turn, in an order which will be clear to me, if not to you, to our speakers, or our panellists.

Last year I noticed that John Brumby, former Premier, published a persuasive article in the *Melbourne Review* which was entitled, Melbourne, the Intellectual Capital of Australia. And Brumby’s article recalled in my mind a discussion that I encountered and was puzzled by, when I arrived at the University of Melbourne in 1966. It was a discussion that had been stimulated I think now, by an article of Manning Clark’s, written a few years earlier, which argued that while, in 19th century Sydney, intellectuals had been pre-occupied by arguments concerning self-worth between English settlers and the native born. In Melbourne, intellectuals tackled the big questions, following the Darwinian Revolution, most importantly, the implications of the recently announced death of God.

In this discussion, the contrast was between Melbourne and Sydney, as it often is in such discussions. Melbourne’s intellectuals were, in this discourse, serious, optimistic about their place in the scheme of things, and their influence, socially engaged. And I think implicitly, often of the left. By contrast, Sydney’s intellectuals felt themselves to be marginal, were pessimistic, and were socially detached.

It was difficult for me to locate the source of the confidence at that time about Melbourne’s intellectual centrality, but it was part of the atmosphere of the university. Sometimes emphasis was placed on the recent movements of thought at the University of Melbourne then. Sometimes in the place of the great liberal newspaper, as it was then, the *Age*, sometimes in the cultural role of the small magazines, like *Meanjin*, *Overland*. In this discourse, it interests me to think back now, the place of Melbourne in the advance of scientific knowledge and understanding was rarely discussed. Eventually this line of conversation led to a major conference sponsored by *Meanjin*, I'm pleased to see the editor of that time here tonight, Jim Davidson, entitled *St Petersburg AKA Melbourne or Tinsel Town AKA Sydney*. And a large audience, we were told in *Meanjin*, attended, and excellent papers delivered.

A lot has changed and I'm interested tonight in trying to work out what has changed since the time of that conference, which was quite a long time ago. But one thing that does occur to me when I think about Melbourne in recent times, is how much of what I valued of recent initiatives, has come from here. I think of, for example, and we’ll be talking about it a bit, the Wheeler Centre, which I don’t think has anything like it in the rest of Australia. I think of, and we’ll be talking about this obviously, what I now call Langridge Street, the four initiatives that Chris Feik and I and Morry Schwarz have been involved in, Morry Schwarz being the great inspirer of them. We’ll talk about them.

I think too of something that I think has been a great initiative called The Conversation, the website which for the first time really has academics daily speaking in their disciplines, to a general audience. And it does strike me as unlikely that something as good as that would not have come out of Melbourne, but maybe I'm wrong. I also am very pleased that *Cosmos*, the premier science magazine, has come down to Melbourne in recent times and we’ll be talking about that and perhaps why.

Anyhow, I want to ask questions, and there are reasons why I invited our four distinguished panellists to come and I hope the reason that, and the order even that I ask them, will become clear to you as we try and interrogate the question of really whether Melbourne still is the intellectual capital, but more importantly, what Melbourne contributes to the intellectual life of this country. And I want to begin with Jeff. I mentioned Jeff in the introduction, that one of the reasons Melbourne, when I was a student, was regarded as the intellectual capital of Australia, was because of the energy and the sort of belief in the importance of the small combative cultural magazines, and the two I suppose were very important – *Meanjin* and *Overland*, also *Arena* which had begun by that time, which was even more to the left than those.

So, I know you’ve been thinking about this, and could I ask you to speak a little bit about what you think to be, in general, first, and then specifically about *Meanjin* and perhaps *Overland*, and *Arena* if you can. The role of these magazines, and what they saw they were doing, at that time. I'm thinking now about the thirty or forty years after the end of the Second World War.

**Jeff Sparrow:**

Yeah, I think it’s important to put the discussion in a kind of context, before I move specifically on to that point. I mean, when we are talking about culture in Australia, we’re almost taking it for granted in the way we’re framing this session, we’re talking about the cities, and that really has been how culture has developed since the Industrial Revolution – it’s always been the cities that lead the way. But it is worth making that point explicit, because it’s quite foreign to how these questions are usually phrased in Australian culture more broadly, where it’s assumed that the real Australia is the bush, or the real Australia is counter-posed to the inner city elites which are somehow interlopers who don’t represent what the interests of real Australians are, and so it is worth pointing out I think, that by 1914 Australia is one of the most urbanised countries in the world, so when we’re talking about Australia's intellectual culture, it really does come down to which of the cities is going to predominate, which was kind of framed in the way you put the question.

So if we’re talking about the history of the little magazines, it’s really a question as to which city a particular magazine was going to develop in, and I think the case studies of *Meanjin* and *Overland*, are kind of fascinating that way. I'm a little bit intimidated because Jim Davidson is here, someone who has forgotten more about this particular subject than I will ever know and I'm sure he will jump up in the question time to correct me, but they do make an interesting contrast because of course *Meanjin* is not a Melbourne publication originally. *Meanjin* is a Brisbane publication, and in fact the first editions are explicitly framed as, it’s a magazine of Queensland writing.

Now, Clem Christesen, the founding editor, when he was talking about putting out a new magazine in Brisbane, explicitly says what a crazy thing this is to do, there was no place in Australia that was less suited to an intellectual magazine. He talks about how few books are in the Brisbane Library. There’s no one there who’s interested in poetry, and here they are, trying to put out this magazine. At the same time, though, I think when people talk about the coming of modernism in Australia, one of the things that people always go back to, is the influx of American soldiers bringing with them jazz, bringing with them modern literature and all the rest of it. And of course, Brisbane, in the Second World War, is this great meeting place between Australian soldiers and American soldiers, so there’s a sense that Brisbane perversely, is a kind of fitting place for *Meanjin* to begin.

But of course, *Meanjin* is brought to Melbourne and why is it brought to Melbourne? It’s brought to Melbourne because Melbourne University offers Christesen some funding, and so in that sense I guess, I mean, it’s one of the perennial issues for little magazines, that you chase the money. So there is a sense where, you know, that Melbourne, traditionally regarded as the wealthiest of the cities, a city with a long tradition of culture and bookselling, remember this is the place where, you know, Cole’s Book Arcade is in Melbourne. And now we remember Cole as almost a comical figure of *Cole’s Funny Picture Book*, but, you know, Cole’s Book Arcade has a million titles on display throughout the late 19th century. It’s kind of the amazon.com of the 19th century – the biggest bookselling place in the Southern Hemisphere, and it’s located here in Melbourne.

*Overland* on the other hand, I think, is a quintessentially Melbourne story. I mean, *Overland* was launched in Melbourne in 1954 and I don’t think could have been launched anywhere else. The antecedent that makes *Overland* possible is Frank Hardy’s *Power Without Glory*, a book which is produced entirely outside the norms of Australian publishing and bookselling, and yet manages to reach a mass audience and what’s more, manages to have a huge political impact, and after that, suddenly there’s this great interest in the possibilities of a literature that is written by ordinary people, but is also reaching a working-class readership, and there’s a whole series of initiatives – the Australasian Book Society I think which is something again based in Melbourne, which is very rarely talked about today, even though it’s an extraordinarily interesting kind of initiative, that leads directly into the formation of *Overland*, so I think the two people, apart from Stephen Murray-Smith, editor of *Overland*, and Ian Turner, another key figure, that you can most attribute that sort of renaissance of working-class publishing at that time. On the one hand Ralph Gibson, who’s a leading intellectual of the Communist Party, and sort of indicative of the way that the Melbourne intelligentsia was leaning left in the way that you put it before. He’s someone who’s come from – his father’s a university professor, and he joins the Communist Party, and this unheralded, unprecedented sort of move from someone of that background.

And the second figure who is very often forgotten, but deserves to be better remembered, is George Seelaf from the Meat Workers’ Union. People might know that Footscray Arts Centre is currently celebrating its anniversary and George Seelaf is the great mover and shaker behind that as well.

So this combination of a working class movement that is increasingly interested in culture, and also a left that has sort of ties with these middle class intellectuals like Ralph Gibson. That I think seems to me is the kind of ferment out of which *Overland* comes and something that could only have happened in Melbourne.

**Robert Manne:**

Could I ask a question? When I was a student, there was a sense in which these, you call them little magazines, these little magazines were actually so important in the life of the nation, that if Melbourne was the place where they were located, that would be itself a claim for Melbourne being the intellectual capital. Now, I think things have changed a lot since then, but why at that time? What was the political ... partly, why were they regarded as so important, and what was the political kind of hope resting in these little magazines of cultural critique or political critique?

**Jeff Sparrow:**

I was thinking about this a lot since you asked me to participate in this – how we sort of identify intellectual currents in the way we’re talking about here, and I think one of the difficulties in us having this discussion is that intellectual culture in Australia, it’s a very large geographical country with a very small population and the intellectual currents tend to be so very, very thin, that very often, a small group of people or a single institution, can have a tremendous effect out of all proportion. I mean, think of say, The Push, in Sydney, and the influence of John Anderson, the philosopher. Now, had he been in Melbourne, would something similar have taken place? Well, it was largely a movement built around his personality. I think in that sense, to have an institution like a magazine, where there’s a coterie of people who are talking, who are debating ... I mean, you know, I at various times have gone through the *Overland* archives and seen this sort of, sometimes quite vicious correspondence between these people, but much better to have someone viciously attacking you than to have someone ignoring you.

**Robert Manne:**

I'm not sure, I'm not sure ...

**Jeff Sparrow:**

Well, yes, you have some experience of this. But I think that one of the things that little magazines did then and one of the things that we still try to do today, is to kind of act as a catalyst, to be the kind of grit inside the oyster shell that gives rise to something more than itself, you know, to create a community of people who talk together, who collaborate, who argue, and precisely because Australian culture was and is so thin, I think you can have results out of all proportion to your actual size.

**Robert Manne:**

I might leave it there, just because we’re going to have to be reasonably economical with the time, and turn to Hilary, and the reason I'm turning to Hilary now is because in the ... and this is within our memory, for me, there’s a certain moment in which the culture in Australia seems to shift and there seems to me a sort of cultural explosion, or cultural revolution, which we call the sixties, but I think mainly happened in the seventies in fact. Certainly from my memory there were starts in the sixties, but the real cultural shift ... and I can think in Australia, it’s a worldwide movement, or a Western worldwide movement, but it ... we often think of it as the Whitlam period, where a very kind of old fashioned society modernised, reformed, new hopes were opened and so on.

It does strike me that Melbourne was more the locale of the cultural part of that than anywhere else, and I think for example, of the incredible energy that came out of theatre, La Mama and Pram Factory in particular. Again, it was a radical theatre and an activist theatre ...

**Hilary McPhee:**

It came out of student theatre in the sixties, in the mid sixties to late sixties.

**Robert Manne:**

Anyhow, I partly wonder whether you think there’s any truth in the idea that that kind of big cultural shift was more located in Melbourne than elsewhere?

**Hilary McPhee:**

Yes, of course it was located here, but there was a lot going on in Sydney as well, in the small theatres and in the small magazines and in writing, obviously, lots of short stories were being ... the thing about small magazines is that they draw content in from everywhere. The thing about small publishers is that they do the same. I think of publishing really as being a form of conduit for people’s work that’s happening all around the place, so it’s not ... I find it very difficult to think of it in terms of personalities, except that, Di Gribble and I met each other after university and decided to start McPhee Gribble, and of course, we’d been blooded in the election of ’72, prior to that by interviewing all the politicians on feminism, of course. We went around and interviewed politicians, federally, and state politicians, with a whole lot of other women, and published a guide to their politics, which was the first time it had been done in Australia. So we, our blood was up, I guess ...

**Robert Manne:**

Were you both in publishing at that time?

**Hilary McPhee:**

No, no, no, I had been at Penguin, as their first baby editor, at the time when *Portnoy’s Complaint* was published by Penguin Australia to break the censorship ... the censorship was dreadful in Australia in this period, as a lot of you will know. But we managed to get *Portnoy* released in all states in the end, it took years and years to happen, but that case ... I think the *Portnoy* happened, the publishing of *Portnoy* was in 1969 or 1970, huge fuss, and cops raiding warehouses and all that sort of stuff – it was marvellous. Very exciting. So there was a real sense that things could happen. It was about the politics of the day and then of course Whitlam got in and people started coming back to Australia because of this and there was a sense that all kinds of things could happen. Di and I, with no resources at all to rub together, except a tiny room and a white typewriter which we bought with a bit of money from Di’s father, a tiny bit of money, started publishing ... packaging for other publishers, and then we started publishing. People came to us, because the large publishers didn’t want to publish fiction first up, they didn’t want to publish women’s writing first up. The publishing in those days was divided into hardbacks and paperbacks, by and large, and Angus and Robertson in Sydney had some marvellous novels, and Penguin would buy the paperback rights of some of them. Penguin, by the time I left, had an editor called John Hooker, who used to write novels himself, and he used to pride himself on saying in his letters of rejection, “we’re okay for novels at Penguin, thanks”, and would only do non-fiction. So there was a gap for us, and people came to us that didn’t want to go elsewhere, partly because of feminism, partly because they didn’t like the big publishers, and partly because I guess, they would be very likely to be knocked back by the big publishers. We only published people who weren’t famous – that was one of the differences I think that people forget now, because most of the people we published have now become famous.

We commissioned lots of work, we found authors to write books we thought were needed. And I guess that’s very like small magazines do.

**Robert Manne:**

What would be an example of that?

**Hilary McPhee:**

Oh, Kaz Cooke for instance. Kaz Cooke came riding by as a very funny marvellous woman, and we suggested the book that Kaz published, *The Modern Girl’s Guide to Sex*. And *Modern Girl’s Guide to Everything*, and on we went. And so fiction was only part of what we did. We did a lot of other kinds of publishing. We also had a perspective on the world because of the politics of the day, which was, to look out beyond Australia, not at England, but at America and Asia, that was extremely important to us. So we were selling books, we were buying books, we were commissioning writers from other parts of the world. We had a little translation list by the time we foundered at the end of the eighties.

So it was a way of ... it was a different perspective I guess, and one of my difficulties with this topic Robert, is I think at the time we found Melbourne a very smug, snobbish place. Melbourne University was indeed very snobbish and smug. In some ways it still is. There’s remnants of that kind of culture sloshing around. It was the only university of course. And Melbourne and Sydney between them had the most extraordinary battles of the mind, but the way they played out in the world that we were operating in was tiresome rather than liberating.

**Robert Manne:**

But wasn’t it part of that movement ...

**Hilary McPhee:**

It was part of the ambience, of course, of the place, but I wouldn’t say it was essential to our health and vigour. We moved backwards and forwards to Sydney as often as we could, because we believed that publishing meant editing people that you could look in the eyes of, so we had a lot of Sydney authors, we had a lot of Western Australian authors, and sat on far too many boards and committees in order to get free plane travel – that was one of the tiresome things about being Di and me, we put our hands up whenever anybody asked us, we’d say, is there a plane fare involved? And off we’d go, and see ten authors in Sydney and go to a tedious meeting, so it was a different kind of way of working. That’s I guess what I'm trying to say.

**Robert Manne:**

I think McPhee Gribble in fairness, is sort of ... it’s part of the national history. Lots of things happened. I mean, I'll be talking about Morry Schwarz later. He at the same time had something called Outback Press and I don’t think many people would remember that.

**Hilary McPhee:**

Which lasted just a few years, and we were very fond of Outback Press. We used to meet in each other’s carparks and have revolutionary ...

**Robert Manne:**

The question I'm asking is, some things seem to fit into history and stay there, and some things are done and then pass out of history. McPhee Gribble I think would be a part of any cultural history done of 20th century Australia. A paragraph would have to be devoted to McPhee Gribble.

**Hilary McPhee:**

Only a paragraph?

**Robert Manne:**

It’s a very short history. A chapter.

But my question is, when you think back on it, what were the reasons? Was it because you picked up authors like Tim Winton and Helen Garner, or was it because ...

**Hilary McPhee:**

What was the reason for what?

**Robert Manne:**

For why there is a memory of McPhee Gribble. It’s become something more than a passing part of publishing history.

**Hilary McPhee:**

The books were terrific, that’s why. I mean, the authors we got were wonderful and it’s all about the writers I believe.

**Robert Manne:**

Not feminism, as one of the aspects?

**Hilary McPhee:**

Feminism, we always published men. We happened to be feminists, but we published men. We liked men. We had men working for us, too. But we attracted very good writers because we gave very good service. We were terrific publishers really.

Clem was a very good editor, who I worked for, for a little while, and I learn a lot from, so a good editor is an important catalyst as well, but the authors I would say are always the ones that survive. Publishers come and go and are worthy of only a small paragraph, in the end.

**Robert Manne:**

Sorry, I didn't mean ... I just meant, you’ll be in the history.

One final question, but you might have a lot to say about it. After McPhee Gribble, you went on to chair Australian Council, Australia Council.

**Hilary McPhee:**

That was committee land, my God.

**Robert Manne:**

And I'd be really interested if, in the question about Melbourne as the intellectual capital, whether there was a Melbourne-Sydney difference in your experience as the Chair of the Australia Council?

**Hilary McPhee:**

The Australia Council was a national institution of course, and we had to represent on all the boards and committees as best we could, the people from all states, so there was ... it was very fair in that way. But the tensions about who got published, who were funded, who were ... particularly amongst the poets, they were terribly hard to deal with. They were dreadful.

**Robert Manne:**

Mainly interested in money?

**Hilary McPhee:**

No, not particularly interested in money because there was never any money in poetry, but just interested in stopping each other being funded.

I was the Chair of the whole thing and I had Chairs of the Literature Board and Chairs of the Visual Arts Board and so on, reporting to the Council that I was in charge of, and it was deeply fascinating to discover how different art forms worked, and how similar artists’ needs were, writers’ and artists’ needs were, but how different of course they were at the core of things. So it was a very interesting time for me in spite of the committees and in spite of the plane travel and all that stuff, but a vicious world, because people were protecting their patch. This was at the beginning of the Keating era and Paul Keating, some of you will remember, didn’t like the Australia Council much, at that stage. He thought it was full of people who wanted money, and indeed it was full of people who wanted money, and there was a sense that it was going to be given to the departments, given to closed ... all sorts of rumours were flying around. I was persuaded by him to do, he talked about poisoned chalices and don’t do it, and all that sort of stuff, but I did, and it was in fact a really interesting time for me because I got a global view, not a global view, a view of Australian work right around the country. I travelled, travelled, travelled, explaining the changes we were making, to simplify the bureaucracy and all of that, and saw marvellous stuff, all over the place. Amazing stuff. So that was great.

**Robert Manne:**

And a Melbourne-Sydney difference?

**Hilary McPhee:**

The Melbourne- Sydney difference was, I suppose, they were all equally awful, I would say.

**Robert Manne:**

I would say the same.

**Hilary McPhee:**

I reel back thinking, my God, those who had pipelines to funding, because people get very good at writing applications. It must be the same in academia. You do find the same people being successful in their research applications and so on, and the Australia Council was a bit like that, there were people who ... I had a whistle-blower, I'll tell you, who came to me when I first arrived, and said, whisper, whisper, I can show you a list of all of those people who’ve had the major grants since the Council began, thirty years before, and it was astonishing, and the age range crept up and up and up and there they all were. Still getting millions and millions out of the Council, by being very smart at manipulating things. So it was interesting, rather than anything to do with this topic.

**Robert Manne:**

But Melbourne and Sydney were the same in their barbarousness.

**Hilary McPhee:**

Absolutely. Both equally barbarous.

**Robert Manne:**

Elizabeth. As I said in the introduction, I think it’s true that when we were, in the sixties discussing Melbourne-Sydney, I don’t think there was much discussion of the scientific input of Melbourne, and it did occur to me when I was thinking about this topic recently, and I asked you to come on the panel, how much distinguished science has indeed been associated with Melbourne? I don’t know whether you agree with that or not, and if you do, if you could speak a little bit about that in a very general way – the tradition of Melbourne in the area of scientists, science, scientific institutions.

**Elizabeth Finkel:**

Yes. Well, so off the top of my head, and I suppose most people could rattle off the Walter & Eliza Hall Institute and you know, the whole Parkville precinct. But I did a little bit of research and called up my mates, and I've got some data to put behind it. So I think, so one way to look for data, is you look at what percentage of government grants are won by Melbourne. So if you look generally, in science we’re winning about a quarter of Australian Research Council grants. So that’s good. Generally, well, we are about a quarter of the population so we’re winning about a quarter of the grants. And if you look at medical research, you know, we’re totally ... we’re punching twice above our weight, almost 42% or more in some years, of medical research grants all come to Melbourne.

And everybody I interviewed – I interviewed about six people who are heads of various research institutes and even people who aren’t from Melbourne, and it’s quite incontrovertible, we are definitely the centre of gravity for medical research. We’ve been like that for as long as any of these people could remember. And we have some ... well, we have star institutes, we have like the Walter & Eliza Hall Institute, whose director in the 1940s, McFarlane Burnett, won the Nobel Prize in immunology and the Walter & Eliza Hall Institute has continued to make these world-leading contributions. Some of the ones we’d be familiar with are the discovery of what are called the colony-stimulating factors, so if anybody unfortunately has had cancer, or knows anyone who’s had cancer, these days survival rates are much better and that’s in no small part because of the colony-stimulating factors. What this means is, when you go and have cancer therapy, radio therapy or chemo therapy, the doctors can hit you much harder without killing you, because they can afterwards give you these colony-stimulating factors which will bring back your white blood cells. So that was work by Don Metcalf in Melbourne, at the Walter & Eliza Hall Institute, Jacques Miller, also from the Walter & Eliza Hall Institute discovered the role of the thymus in the immune system. So I've made a little list here. I'll just read down lest I forget anybody.

So I think I've just got twelve. But I could go on and on. So, Alan Trounson won two silver medals, first of all in the ‘80s I think it was – he produced the world’s second IVF baby and then in the late ‘90s, his team was the second in the world to produce human embryonic stem cells. Peter Coleman and Joseph Varghese, based at Monash in CSIRO did the work behind developing the drug which turned out to be Relenza, an anti-flu drug, because they figured out what the crystal structure was of the flu virus. Moving right along, the bionic ear, pioneered by Graeme Clark in the 1970s, the Howard Flory Institute, world-leading discoveries into how we regulate our salt and water, and also they discovered the structure of the hormone that helps women give birth, called Relaxen, and they got a patent for that. The jet-lag pill, discovered by Roger Short at Monash University. Epilepsy genes discovered by Hans Berkovic at Melbourne University. World-leading research on Alzheimer’s by ColinMasters and Ashley Bush at the University of Melbourne – they’ve been pioneering early detection methods by imaging the brain, which is good, but not much good unless you have a way to treat the early signs and they’ve also been developing an Alzheimer’s drug.

Paul Zimmet at the Baker was one of the first to link lifestyle, Western lifestyle changes with diabetes and indeed predicted the current epidemic we have of diabetes. And Terry Speed, also at the Walter & Eliza Hall Institute, a mathematician who’s learned how to crunch this incredible amounts of data coming out of DNA sequencing, for instance, can you get at the cancer cells’ secret by finding its secrets buried in the DNA data.

So, no doubt about it, we are definitely ... we have a very illustrious history and we have a very illustrious present. I could rattle off another list like this, but I won’t. What is not so certain is our future. And certainly a number of the heads of institutes I spoke to said, well, it’s all very well, we’re at the hull of our various ships, and we’ve done very well, but to stay ahead in this race, we need to keep getting the funding and we’re not quite getting the funding we need. We don’t quite have the vision from the Victorian government that Bracks and the Brumbys had so there’s a little bit of a concern about complacency.

**Robert Manne:**

I'm a historian, so I'm going to ask a question which maybe you won’t know what the answer is. But my question is why, in the area of medical research, and incredibly interesting what you’ve said, it’s really an impressive record, do you have, or did the people you talked to have a theory as to why Melbourne ...

**Elizabeth Finkel:**

Only John Funder, the wonderful polymath, he put it down to the Presbyterians and the Anglicans. And I being a nice Jewish girl, could not understand what he was talking about.

**Robert Manne:**

He didn’t explain ...

**Elizabeth Finkel:**

Well, I asked him to explain it and he ... you know, I couldn’t with any authority explain, except that they were ... you know, had a very philanthropic streak to their cultures. I'll have to get back to you on that one.

**Robert Manne:**

And if we now ... a great development I think in Melbourne is, you’ve brought *Cosmos* down here. Could you tell ... people won’t know much about the history in general I think, the history of *Cosmos*. Why you ... I think you and your husband Alan, who’s Chancellor of Monash University, started it from what I know ... just a little bit about the history of the magazine and what the mission of the magazine is, and will be.

**Elizabeth Finkel:**

Well, compared to my illustrious company, we don’t have much history I'm afraid. We are relative newbys, and even more so now as I'll explain in a minute. I should say, Alan and I co-founded it, with Wilson da Silva and Kylie Ahern about eight years ago. At that time, Wilson was the editor-in-chief, Kylie was the publisher ...

**Robert Manne:**

In Sydney?

**Elizabeth Finkel:**

And it was founded in Sydney. And Alan and myself, we were just sort of on the sidelines. I was a contributor. I should also just say that Alan is also President of ATSI, the Technological Sciences Academy. When it was founded eight years ago, well, it was really something driven by Wilson and Kylie, and we thought, yeah, well, that sounds like a good idea, we’d like to be part of that. A sense of, why doesn’t Australia have a science magazine to *Rival*, *Discover* or *New Scientist*? I personally had been ... I started off my career as a research scientist and worked in the US as a scientist but when I came back to Australia with a young child, research was just too taxing, I found, to combine with parenting and so I took up science writing, and it was continually frustrating and humiliating in a way, to try to be writing for international magazines, as I did for all those years, because you know, the constant repost was, well, why should we be interested in this story? You know, why is the rest of the world interested in this story?

As it is, I'm proud to say I got a lot of Australian stories into international magazines like *Science*, but for me it was a sense of, it’s about time we had our own science magazine. Why not?

So, it was run from Sydney for about eight years by Wilson da Silva. Why did we bring it to Melbourne? Practicality. The magazine was losing viability there, so we brought it here so we could run it pretty much out of the back of Alan’s office, and Alan gave me an offer I couldn’t refuse. I'm not sure if I should reveal this, but he said, either we wind it up, or you run it. Which is a terrifying prospect. So that’s why I say it was a newby magazine before but it’s a totally newby magazine now. I knew very little about how to run a magazine, so now I've been editor-in-chief for the last eight months. I've produced four issues. This is the most recent issue. I've been on a very, very steep learning curve. The whole culture of the magazine world, and what’s involved in leading and coaxing, nurturing writers and editing, and Alan, my husband, has had to turn into a publisher. So that’s the truth.

**Robert Manne:**

And how would you describe the sort of, the mission of the magazine?

**Elizabeth Finkel:**

What’s our mission? We are both, you know, scientific babies, what can I say? Our whole lives have been in science. I've been a scientist or a science writer, he’s been, you know, PhD electronics engineer, developed bio-tech companies, and now he’s president of the Academy of Technological Sciences. We both have a tremendous passion for science. We both love sharing the stories of science and we both have a great sense of the responsibility of the role science plays in society.

So, our mission and our vision is to educate, to titillate, and to guide. Titillation, well, it’s not hard, I mean, I can’t help but get titillated when I get into a story on science. I mean, who wouldn’t be? These are ... you know, I challenge you to find me better adventure stories. You know, these are stories that are swashbuckling heroes, and frontier territory, and conflict and competition, and new horizons. But equally, I feel a great sense of the responsibility of guiding, because it’s staggering to me, you cannot almost look at any area of science that now isn’t butting up against social issues, and getting very gnarly.

So I feel a great sense of responsibility to try to guide, to try to bring very balances, even-toned narratives to the audience. Our latest issue is titled ‘The Food Wars’ and we did it because ... this is my fourth issue and the one I really feel we’ve hit our stride in terms of a mission. Journalistically it was excellent because we’re right ahead of the curve. We’re celebrating the 100th anniversary of Norman Borlaug this month and he’s the leader of the Green Revolution or the father of the Green Revolution, and most people have never heard of it, but if you have heard of it, probably a lot of you will have very negative attitudes towards it because, well, the Green Revolution is what is responsible for India and Pakistan and much of the world having been able to feed themselves for the last fifty years. But one of the by-products of it was it increased the use of chemicals and according to a certain narrative, disadvantaged small-scale farmers, which actually doesn’t hold up to scrutiny.

But it’s been the fore-runner of this tremendous anti-science backlash in agriculture. You know, Monsanto is the devil, and GM is taking over our whole food supply. So we’ve devoted this whole issue to try and unpack that. A huge challenge.

**Robert Manne:**

Any plans for climate wars?

**Elizabeth Finkel:**

Sure, well we keep that going continually. Yes.

**Robert Manne:**

I'd better move on. Thanks very much Elizabeth.

Chris, someone who is used to coaxing authors every day. Chris is the publisher at Black Inc and the editor of the *Quarterly Essay*. I suppose the first thing that I wanted to ask you about is something that, to see whether you agree with this, that I think Melbourne has recently established a pre-eminence in the area of quality non-fiction, serious quality non-fiction. I think Sydney has Allen & Unwin, maybe in New South, but there’s your Black Inc and *Quarterly Essay*, there’s Text Publishing, which has been extremely important in that area, there’s Scribe, which has been very important in that area. So I partly wanted to ask, why Melbourne? Whether it’s serendipidous that Melbourne has played this role in non-fiction publishing. Whether you agree with me that it’s the place that most good non-fiction comes out of.

**Chris Feik:**

Yes, I think it’s true. I totted up in my head. I think it was probably Australia's small or independent publishers. Melbourne probably has as many as the rest of the country combined, and of those you mentioned, well, Text, Scribe, and Black Inc and on top of that there would be Hardie Grant, the just finished up Arcade, MUP, Monash Publishing as well. And of those, I think probably Black Inc, Scribe, and Text would probably be the three biggest, as well. And we all started at roughly the same time. I thought there was a kind of hiatus after the ‘70s, ‘80s, with McPhee Gribble, Outback, etc and then Michael Heyward came along with Text in the mid-‘90s and Henry at Scribe and then Black Inc started about fifteen years ago, and we’ve all slowly grown over that time, and it’s a good question as to why all three of us are together in Melbourne, because we’re essentially competing, but we’ve each carved our niches, so Black Inc tends to do Australian non-fiction, Text tends to do Australian fiction, and international fiction, and Scribe brings in a lot of international non-fiction. So we’ve each got our specialities.

But as to why here, I think that’s a very complicated ... or has a very complicated answer. First of all, I think it helps that Penguin’s here because Penguin distribute all of us and that means that as small publishers, we have a national reach equal to any large publisher. So God bless Penguin.

I think ... what else? Well, competition is healthy in that sense, because we’re constantly looking at Text and Scribe, and they’re looking at us, and so we’ve been forced to be as ingenious as possible, and as competitive as possible. I think, I sometimes wonder, they’re all intangible factors. I think that the ... I think we’ve been very lucky to have entrepreneurial figures like Morry Schwarz and Henry Rosenbloom and I wonder if there’s a kind of cultural mesh or merging has occurred. It’s a bit tangential here, but Ken Inglis once told me a story about ... he went to Melbourne High School, and as a very young man, and he said that his mind was opened up by all the post-war Jewish refugee children that he worked with. They were incredibly cultured and they showed him things that he’d never thought of before, and I think Morry went to Melbourne High, and I think that European cultured ingenuity that they’ve got, also meshed with the spirit of social optimism that you mentioned that Manning Clark put his finger on, and I think the two things came together in publishing and so that’s been incredibly powerful. And then I think there’s just a vast cultural infrastructure in Melbourne, of all kinds – community radio, what else? The little magazines which have tended to be here, all of it converges and makes things possible that wouldn’t happen otherwise.

**Robert Manne:**

I’ve got to guard against self-promotion here from my point of view, but it does seem to me that what I call Langridge Street has recently played an incredible role in Australian culture, and just Langridge Street is a smallish building from which Black Inc, the *Quarterly Essay*, *The Monthly* and now the *Saturday Paper* all come. And I wonder Chris, and Morry Schwarz is the publisher of all those things. I have to say he’s Chris’s employer and friend and my friend, but I do think it would be appropriate to say a little bit about each of those ... you’ve talked about Black Inc but a bit about the role the *Quarterly Essay* plays in the culture, and the role of *The Monthly*, which is very different from the little magazine, as a different kind of thing, and finally what the *Saturday Paper* is hoping to do.

**Chris Feik:**

Sure, yeah.

**Robert Manne:**

Can you speak for Langridge Street?

**Chris Feik:**

Absolutely. I was thinking locations are important, but I was thinking for a long time Black Inc and *The Monthly* weren’t actually in Langridge Street, were in Carlow House in the city, which is a old art deco building on the corner of Flinders Lane and Elizabeth Street and it was a very run-down old building and with quite ancient wiring, but we were happy there, but take this as an allegory if you want, but then a developer from Sydney bought it and ripped out all the art deco features in the lobby and replaced it with white marble one day, doubled the rent, and that’s how we’re in Langridge Street.

So yeah, all these different things. A lot of them just sprung from Morry’s brain actually. So *Quarterly Essay* was ... I'm not sure that there’s anything like *Quarterly Essay* elsewhere in the world that I can ... not that I've found, something that features one long essay, plus responses to it, obviously four times a year, and Morry had this hunch that people were looking for a timely essay which wasn’t say a policy report, but something that dealt with an issue in depth and that allowed a novelist or a journalist or a scholar, time to look at something of the day and that’s proved to be absolutely right. I think when we began, people scoffed and said, oh, you’ll be lucky to sell 800 copies of this, and I mean, some of the recent ones have sold 20,000 copies. So, that’s a testament to something. Perhaps Morry’s ingenuity.

*The Monthly*, part of the impulse there was just that it felt like any self-respecting country had to have a magazine that featured long-form journalism, and long reviews. It didn’t seem enough to just subscribe to the *New Yorker* and content yourself with that, and the *Bulletin* died shortly after we started *The Monthly*.

**Robert Manne:**

No connection.

**Chris Feik:**

No connection, no. It was a long time dying actually. So that’s where that came from. And the *Saturday Paper*, which just started last Saturday, I suppose the idea is that you could write a weekly paper that was almost like a guerrilla operation, with quite a small staff with none of the legacy costs of a large newspaper, and if the reporting was sharp enough and the accounts were definitive enough, and it knew exactly what it was doing, that there’d be a space for that. And obviously there’s a sense in which the Murdoch right has been so, become so bullying and barracking, that there’s a need for some kind of counterbalance for that as well.

**Robert Manne:**

And just one final question, if I might, and then I'd like to throw, have conversation amongst the panel and then questions. We need some time for that as well, from the audience.

But the question I'd like to get you to talk about a bit, is, one of the things that strikes me and I mentioned it at the beginning, the incredible successes of Melbourne, which I'm sure is not replicated anywhere else in Australia, is the Wheeler Centre, which almost every day seems to have an interesting discussion of books, non-fiction, fiction, public affairs, to get an audience almost every night of the week. It seems to me incredible, and probably not a fully recognised achievement, but I just wondered how important it was from the point of view of your publishing, to have the Wheeler Centre there.

**Chris Feik:**

Yeah, yeah. Actually it reminds me, when I was thinking about this, I thought you maybe know the poem by Chris Wallace-Crabbe, the last line – it’s called *Melbourne*. He says, ‘though much has died here, little has been born’, and I think it’s probably not right, is it? Yes, so the Wheeler Centre is an instance of that. Somebody, I think, I'm not sure who it was, had the bright idea of nominating Melbourne as a UNESCO city of literature. I think the Wheeler Centre developed in part out of that. And obviously the Wheeler’s funds were incredibly crucial as well. But yeah, it provides a forum for events in the middle of the city. Readings I think used to do that to some extent in Carlton and Hawthorn, but to have something there, right in the centre of the city, most days of the week, is, yeah, incredibly crucial.

**Robert Manne:**

So, can I now just throw up into a more general discussion. This has been very under control, but to now make it less controlled. Just ask the general question, and I'll butt out, just the question of whether you think it is true, as John Brumby said, that Melbourne is the intellectual capital of Australia. Is it a meaningful question? Is there any way of answering it? What do you think?

**Chris Feik:**

I think of what, you think shorthand, what ... Hobart’s got to be in there with a chance now, with MONA. But if you think of Sydney’s archetypal products, they tend to be maverick artists and poets, so I think John Docker with his book *Australian Cultural Elites* was right onto something there. If you think from Christopher Wren and to Adam Cullen, from Brett Whitely, Les Murray, Frank Moorhouse, Bob Adamson, these somehow seem to me at least, to be distinctively Sydney figures and none of them are socially concerned in quite the same way that this Melbourne tradition offers. So, I think if you define the question in the right way, the answer is going to be yes.

**Robert Manne:**

And that question is, is Melbourne the most socially engaged or committed city in some ways, whereas Sydney produces mavericks and eccentric geniuses, Melbourne solemnly produces ...

**Chris Feik:**

Po faced ...

**Robert Manne:**

The Melbourne school of serious discussion, is that ...

[And Barry Humphries ...]

And Barry Humphries to mock the seriousness of the city.

**Jeff Sparrow:**

Well, I'm using your quote of a politician putting forward this ... I must say, when I hear someone making a claim about city x being more or less cultured than city y, I always think that there’s a funding application somewhere attached to it, and I vaguely remember when the applications were being drawn up for that Melbourne being the city of literature, there was an awful lot of scrabbling around to find claims to bolster that, so in some ways, I'd like to argue the question, doesn’t ... the question of geography doesn’t mean as much today as it once did. That in this networked, online world, it doesn’t matter ... I would like to argue that, but I'm not sure that’s true. With *Overland* now, we spend most of our time producing online content, and last year we had half a million visits to our online magazine, over the course of a year, but when I actually look at the statistics, there still is a geographical quarter that the majority of our subscribers are in Melbourne, the majority of our contributors are in Melbourne, I do think it goes back to that sense of creating a coterie, creating a kind of sense of engagement, back to some of the things that you’re talking about, in terms of all of the publishers being close to each other, being engaged with each other. I think about things like, I mean, you mentioned the Wheeler Centre but we could talk about Readings as well, the RMIT Creative Writing course, and the kind of connections that people make in a particular place. I also would argue that in some ways, there’s a sense here in which this kind of online networked community creates a yearning for place, and for contact, that probably doesn’t exist before and I think that goes some way to explain the massive popularity of writing festivals, in a way that didn’t exist previously. Everywhere you go, there is this desire to be in the proximity, in the presence of someone.

**Robert Manne:**

But, if I can go back to Manning Clark in 1962, he goes back to the 19th century. His claim is, it’s slightly sort of provocative or it seems in some ways absurd, but the Sydney intellectuals and the thinkers were locked in this battle about, you know, whether the native-born or the British or the English, were the persons of true worth. I think he would think of the *Age* newspaper and the University of Melbourne, and intellectuals like Higginbotham or Deakin as the serious-minded people discussing these serious questions coming out of the extraordinary transformation of Darwin and so on. I must say that when I was at the University of Melbourne, I did feel there were all sorts of currents of thought at the university, which were ... I went from Melbourne actually to Oxford and I found nothing at Oxford. I kept on wondering where was the university? There were great scholars there and great lecturers, but there seemed to me, when I was at the University of Melbourne anyhow, an extraordinary kind of intellectual energy and searching, and atmosphere, and Manning Clark located that in the 19th century, the great age of Australian bourgeoisie centred in Melbourne.

So I wonder, is it possible to think in those very general ways about a city having a kind of atmosphere which continues over time? I take it Jim, in a way by calling Melbourne St Petersburg, there was a thought of that kind in the *Meanjin* conference, thirty-something years ago.

**Chris Feik:**

Can I read something from this book, 1974, *Australian Cultural Elites* – it’s about Sydney and Melbourne ... John Docker, yeah, taking up those themes and he writes this obviously with a deep sense of irony, but he says, ‘there is a Sydney pessimism versus a Melbourne optimism. The Melbourne intellectual is Australian in the sense of trying to uphold whatever is vigorous and fine in the national life and history, and at the same time in possession of civilised ideals of behaviour to rank with the European. The Melbourne intellectual wishes to be decorous and refined, urbane and cultivated, a microcosm of taste and sensibility. The Melbourne male intellectual is confidently middle-class, but proudly capable of being matey.’

**Jeff Sparrow:**

Are we struck by the Anglican Presbyterian thing because ...

**Robert Manne:**

That’s what you were told by John Funder, is it?

**Chris Feik:**

But the other way to spin that. I think of those Norman Lindsay descriptions of Melbourne wowserism. This is the place where, you know, Sunday sabbatarianism means that everything is closed really. I remember reading about Justus Jörgensen and the Monsalvat people and this experience where they would dine in a particular café and people would come to look at them, because they had slightly long hair, and my God, look, there they are. So I don’t know, I suspect a lot of these things depend exactly on where you’re standing. But certainly you can find lots of accounts of Melbourne as this stultifying ... well, the Chris Wallace-Crabbe poem is exactly that.

**Robert Manne:**

I can’t remember it, and others will not know it. What’s in the poem, apart from that last line?

**Chris Feik:**

Well, that’s the line everyone remembers. What is it, that ...

I think about Barry Humphries’ line about the equine mummy, Pharlap, the people would contemplate on sleepy Sunday afternoons.

**Robert Manne:**

And Jeff, one claim would be that Melbourne was the left-wing city, for intellectuals. Is that true? I mean, certainly it is true of *Meanjin*, whereas I was once editor of *Quadrant* which is a Sydney magazine although it came down for a while to Melbourne, which was a conservative magazine, and that was important in the scheme of things, and it came out, really partly at least, it came out of the John Anderson tradition in which probably the most distinguished or important academic in Australian history became very anti-Communist and he had people like Donald Horne and James McCauley and others who he influenced, and that was part of the *Quadrant* tradition, whereas Melbourne, the left seemed to turn into these very combative magazines of sectarian leftism.

**Jeff Sparrow:**

Again, I reckon you can cut it just about any way you like it. I mean, Melbourne was the home base of Maoism, which is the most kind of anti-intellectual kind of aggressive of the left ...

**Robert Manne:**

I remember it well.

**Jeff Sparrow:**

I bet you do ... in recent times, but I mean, the other thing that people always talk about in Melbourne is that the Melbourne left historically tended to be much more respectable, so you think of, say, the Edwardian period, you know, Tom Manne, the great English orator, comes to Victoria and founds the Victorian Socialist Party. This is the organisation out of which John Curtin emerges, but it’s quite respectable. I mean, this is Bernard O’Dowd, Vance and Ed Palmer, all of these Melbourne intellectuals are associated with this current. The Sydney equivalent, well the First World War breaks out and in Sydney the Industrial Workers of the World hold a demonstration. And if you look at the paper of the VSP at the time, they barely notice that the war has taken place. I mean, business just goes on ...

**Robert Manne:**

That’s the great joke about why Germany never had a revolution. It’s because the Communists wouldn’t get on trains unless they had tickets.

I think we might ... I think there are roving mikes and there is quite a bit of time, and I'd like to hear comments and questions about the topic. So, if you could indicate. There is a question at the front here. Indicate by hand. Jim, would you have something to say?

**Q:**

I'm kind of reflecting on a few things that were brought up in that discussion about how Melbourne’s the socially-engaged city and this idea of cultural thinness and it was brought up quite early on, despite being the socially-engaged city, and the most multicultural city in Australia, there still seems to be, in terms of the intellectual culture, it’s very thin in Melbourne, it’s still a networked elite that was talked about a lot, as something of decades gone by. I was just wondering if the panel could talk about the idea of the intellectual thinness, if that’s even a problem. Is it something that needs to be solved?

**Jeff Sparrow:**

Well historically I think it arises in a different kind of way, and I was talking before about the Palmers and you think of the influence of Vance and Eddie, this, you know, power couple to use today’s terminology, who have almost no resources, but it’s simply a culture where there are so few people who are interested in literature, that you know, well these days if you want to write a novel, you know, you can hope you can get a grant from the Australia Council. Back then, you might hope you get a letter from Eddie Palmer encouraging you, and yet they have this tremendous influence because the people who are interested in culture are so few that they find each other. I think today the situation is a little bit different. The thing that we haven’t talked about at all is the university system, where you know, if you’re talking about the intelligentsia, and you know, intellectual life, well, this is where an awful lot of the energy is and I mean, I'm sure there are people here who know more about it than I do, but I do think the university system is going through a period of crisis at the moment. Would that be too extreme?

**Robert Manne:**

It depends what you mean. My sense of, I suppose, the word intellectual is open to different kinds of meaning, and one meaning is ... which I think we’ve been using, is the world of thought and scholarship and science, the products of the life of the mind. I've always thought of intellectual life as a bit narrower than that, being those people of scholarly capacity or background, who wish to shape the future of the world, to have some influence on their society or societies more broadly. In other words, it seems to me, intellectuals are a sub-set of the scholarly scientific community. Now, if that’s the definition of an intellectual, I think that universities have changed a lot in that, to succeed at the university the younger generation that’s at the university can’t afford to do the kinds of things that intellectuals do, which is to write for the general people, to speak in public forums, because the university system, in some ways for good reasons, wants academics to produce refereed journal articles and referees books, but those almost by definition will appeal to those within the area, and you know, in science it’s absolutely crucial that that work is done, and it’s also crucial in other areas. But I do think, from that point of view, whereas when I was at Melbourne University, many of the academics played a big role in public life. That’s not nearly so much the case for the new generation of academics. So from my narrow definition of intellectual life, universities will play less of a role in the future than they did in the past, even though the sector is much larger.

And so I don’t think there’s a crisis in the university sector, I think it goes through financial difficulties from time to time, but I do think there’s ... I think if you look at *The Conversation*, what’s interesting about it is that experts are explaining their expertise to the public, which is a great thing, but you don’t get articles in *The Conversation* very often saying what is wrong with this society, where should we be moving? You know, it’s rather telling you something about their area of expertise.

So, in terms of intellectual matters, I think that’s the most important shift that’s taken place, rather than there being a general crisis. I mean, John might like to say something about that as well.

Questions?

**Q:**

I haven’t really framed a question, so pardon me. I'd like to first of all take up a comment that I think Elizabeth made earlier, raising the point about whether we’d become complacent. I feel that at the moment it’s not complacency so much, and I'm coming from a point of retirement now. I feel our society in the last 25 years we’ll say, the last generation, has become so dictated to by the bottom line, and while governments refuse to fund, as we read recently, science, and they’re so narrow-minded and short sighted, we’re not going to continue to achieve, and I think of the cochlear ear and the $4,000 I think that that gentleman and his company got and now they’re a multi-billion dollar company of international renown. And it’s not just the bottom line, to companies, who might be looking towards making things for the future, it’s the lack of funding to universities, the fact that when I was at Melbourne University, and left as you were arriving, Robert, we had time to read and discuss and do all sorts of things. Looking at my children, and those that have come since, to pay their HECS fees they’ve got to have part-time jobs. There’s no extra time for thought and reflection. Now something else I had in mind ... but all this is the money. The bottom line is stifling us from time to think, analyse and create new ideas. And I think it’s beyond just literature, I think intelligences, I'm glad you are beginning to define it, goes beyond just writing and science – it becomes to all parts of our work. So I think I've probably said enough, but if you’d like to comment, you’re most welcome.

**Robert Manne:**

Elizabeth, can you say something about what you think is the position with funding? You mentioned something to do with that earlier.

**Elizabeth Finkel:**

Well, I think, funding is a little bit of a complicated situation. Researchers will always moan that they’re not getting enough funding and actually Melbourne does quite well with winning grants. But where the heads of the research labs were really worried, is that there’s an area of funding that doesn’t get covered, so when you win ... so we’ve won 42% of the grants for medical research, well that’s great, so let me give you an example of the Walter & Eliza Hall Institute, because I spoke to their head Doug Hilton, and he pointed out, yes, these grants that he’s won will cover projects, they’ll cover the scientists’ salaries, they’ll cover their equipment, but they don’t cover the day to day running of the labs, they don’t cover the electricity bills or the rental or things like that – the so-called operational funding and it’s something that has been neglected for decades. And it’s starting to really bite these research institutes. So what it means is, that they can’t really advance as much as they would like because they’re held back by this lack of operational funding. There’s also a sense that since Brumby’s days we don’t have a kind of vision coming out of government, state government, strategy direction. Brumby for instance was so fired up, he won the synchrotron for Victoria which was an extraordinary achievement. It is Australia's only synchrotron. What is a synchrotron? Well, it’s a huge ... it looks like a huge carousel. It’s related to the sort of atom smashers they have elsewhere in the world, but what it produces, what it’s valued for, is the very intense radiation it produces that can outdo any microscope for peering into the sub-atomic world.

So because Brumby got that for Victoria, it’s acted like a magnet and attracted all this sort of expertise to come here. We’ve just recently won a huge amount of funding for structural biology that’s on the back of the synchrotron. So I think what the scientists are griping about now is lack of strategic vision and leadership coming from the government, of the ilk that we had with Brumby, and still a blind spot about this operational funding, which is not very sexy.

**Robert Manne:**

Can I ask the other half of that question is, which is quite different really, is that now is the time when everyone is encouraged to look after themselves, to work hard, to make money, but there’s a kind of atmosphere in our society which does not encourage reflection. Is there any thoughts on that kind of cultural ...

**Hilary McPhee:**

I think you’re absolutely right. I feel appalled at where we’ve got to too. And I think there’s a lot of fear out there, which I don’t think is being reflected yet in our publications, I have to say. There’s fear of the rise of fundamentalism, there’s fear of all kinds of environmental crises, there’s fear obviously of the economy going phut. There’s not much analysis of where we’re going to go next with this stuff, so I'm looking for a *Quarterly Essay* on all this please.

**Robert Manne:**

Chris, do you have any thoughts on ...

**Chris Feik:**

Well ...

**Hilary McPhee:**

Fear, one on fear.

**Chris Feik:**

It’s quite amorphous.

**Hilary McPhee:**

It’s not amorphous. It’s out there.

**Chris Feik:**

Well, I have a slightly different relation to money, because we’re running a small business in effect, so for us it’s very important how many books we sell and that kind of thing, and that’s a form of stress but it’s also sometimes been a form of discipline, because it’s forced us to be ever more ingenious. So, I do agree with the point about university life being hollowed out to some extent. I recall the aimlessness of my Arts degree and I feel sad that other people aren’t going to have that same aimlessness or reverie, or whatever you like to call it.

**Robert Manne:**

Jim, can I ask you ... Jim Davidson’s here, and he did nod to say he was willing to be asked something. Can I ask you to just ... you were editor of *Meanjin* and thought it was worthwhile having a conference on Melbourne and Sydney. Thoughts on whether or not that question remains alive, or whether or not ...

**Jim Davidson:**

Well, I think it’s been re-figured in all sorts of ways, and when I published those proceedings later, I said this was probably the last moment at which one could realistically talk of two entirely separate cultures. Symbolically, the Stock Exchange became one somewhere about 1984. The conference was in 1980, for *Meanjin*’s 40th anniversary and it was really a wonderful excuse to get a great variety of speakers to advertise that it was *Meanjin*’s 40th anniversary, and also it was the time when Melbourne was losing a lot of creative people to Sydney, so much so that the *Bulletin* came out with a writer on the cover, hitching a lift from Melbourne to Sydney, so it was absolutely of the moment. And the reason why I called it St Petersburg apart from the slight left wing pre-Zharist residences, was that Melbourne just seemed to have been rather like the most eclipsed of the European old capitals, because who imagined that the days of St Petersburg would come back on the map.

So I really don’t have an easy answer to that because I think what’s really happening, is that I'm a little uncomfortable with this whole notion of intellectual capital – I think intellectual capital is something which institutions have, or individuals have, and I think Melbourne as the intellectual capital is a bit of a modulation of something which always embarrassed me and that was the idea of Australia having a culture capital. I think it’s very important that things be diversified and I was very interested in Jeff’s remarks about how concentric *Overland* even on the net remains. But nevertheless we are living a time when things are becoming more de-centred, and I think it’s very important that we go on making our own contributions as best we can, and don’t get caught up in notions of cultural capital, otherwise you’re like those aspirant individuals without much talent who describe themselves as an artist, where somebody actually produces something and calls themselves a writer, or a painter, or a dramatist.

**Robert Manne:**

John, I don’t know whether you’d like to say something about the state of universities, in general, just as way of ending off.

**John Dewar:**

Thank you. I was wondering about the contributions that the universities have given ... I think we provide not just the intellectual grunt to a lot of the things that have been talked about, but often the financial support as well. But to your point Robert, about the conditions for the production of future public intellectuals and whether there is a narrowing of university life in that respect, I think it probably is true, although I think it’s a bit unfair to characterise *The Conversation* as merely the communication of specialist expertise to a generalist audience. I think there is a lot of material on *The Conversation* that is in one sense or another critical of the status quo, but it is increasingly specialised and I think that reflects, to some extent, the growing professionalisation of life in universities, performance management, KPIs, all of the benchmarks that you talked about that is a feature of life in universities now and it probably does squeeze out the more renaissance generalist, such as yourself, Robert, and others, which is a shame, but I don’t think it means that the critical function of universities is diminished. It’s just become a bit more specialised and sort of more subterranean in the disciplines.

But I'm fascinated ... I think this has been a wonderful conversation. But it is true from the point of view of higher education in Melbourne, we are just as ... Anna was described the research institutes and the strength that they have here. I think we are really very lucky with the quality of the universities that we have here and the number – I mean, we have eight in Victoria which is extraordinary, and I think that does help to sustain some of the things that we’ve been talking about.

**Robert Manne:**

Thank you. Well, I think that’s a good point to end on. I'd like to ... I mean, obviously I knew there’s no answer to this question, and I think all good questions don’t have answers, and I'd like very much and very sincerely to thank everyone on the panel for what I think has been a great discussion, and really interesting and opening all sorts of issues that matter. So thank you very much, and thank you for coming.